

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 9414

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, IN
SUBJ: FOREIGN MINISTER'S JUNE 29 POLICY STATEMENT

REF: NEW DELHI 9343

1. THIS MESSAGE IS TO ADD SOME PERSONAL COMMENTS TO OUR EARLIER REPORT ON FOREIGN MINISTER VAJPAYEE'S ADDRESS TO THE LOK SABHA THIS PAST WEDNESDAY WHEN THE EXTERNAL AFFAIRS BUDGET WAS UNDER CONSIDERATION.

2. THE FACT THAT THE MINISTER CHOSE TO OPEN THE DEBATE HIMSELF WITH A MAJOR COMPREHENSIVE STATEMENT OF POLICY IS ITSELF SIGNIFICANT. FOR A MINISTER TO OPEN THE DEBATE IS NOT THE CUSTOM HERE. IN HIS DOING SO, THE JANATA GOVERNMENT HAS STAKED OUT FOR ITSELF CLAIMS BOTH TO AN INHERITED NATIONAL CONSENSUS FOR NON-ALIGNMENT AND TO AN IMPARTIALITY AND FLEXIBILITY WHICH WILL PERMIT INDIA TO ADJUST ITS FOREIGN POLICY RESPONSE TO CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES. IN MY VIEW THE SPEECH IS AN EXPRESSION OF CONSIDERABLE STATESMANSHIP (IN THE BEST SENSE). VAJPAYEE'S PERCEPTION OF NON-ALIGNMENT ENCOMPASSES (A) EVENHANDEDNESS AND GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALL PARTIES, (B) FREEDOM TO JUDGE ISSUES ON THEIR MERITS AND TO CHOOSE IMPARTIALLY

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AMONG THE AVAILABLE OPTIONS, AND (C) A BASIS FOR CONSTRUCTIVE INITIATIVES, NOT A POLICY OF "IMMOBILISM".

3. WHILE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENTS HAVE SET FORTH FORMAL POSITIONS ALONG SOMEWHAT SIMILAR LINES, THE MANNER IN WHICH VAJPAYEE ELABORATED HIS MEANING SUGGESTS TO ME THAT SOMETHING NEW IS INTENDED. FOR EXAMPLE, HE

REVIVED THE GOVERNMENT'S EMPHASIS ON "GENUINE" NON-ALIGNMENT, SOMETHING WHICH WE HAVE NOT HEARD OF FOR SOME WEEKS. HE SAID THAT INDIA SHOULD NOT ONLY REMAIN NONALIGNED BUT "MUST ALSO APPEAR TO BE SO." ALSO, WHEN HE SAID THAT NONALIGNMENT WAS NOT A POLICY OF IMMOBILISM, HE MENTIONED INDIA'S NEW ECONOMIC CAPACITIES AND NEEDS AND WENT ON TO SPEAK OF INDIA'S GREAT ECONOMIC INTERESTS IN THE EEC AND ITS DESIRE TO HAVE A BETTER DIALOGUE WITH EUROPE. HE ALSO SPOKE WARMLY MORE THAN ONCE ABOUT THE POSITIONS OF THE NEW US ADMINISTRATION AND THE WARMTH AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE EXCHANGES BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE PRESIDENT. WHILE COMMENDING INDIA'S MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SOVIET UNION, HE REMARKED THAT, UNLIKE THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT, HE DID NOT SEE INDIA'S RELATIONS WITH EASTERN EUROPE AS IN ANY WAY INHIBITING INDIA'S SEARCH FOR IMPROVED RELATIONS WIH THE US AND WESTERN EUROPE.

4. THE FOREIGN SECRETARY VOLUNTEERED TO ME YESTERDAY THAT VAJPAYEE'S OMISSION OF ANY REFERENCE TO NUCLEAR ISSUES IN THIS SPEECH CAME ABOUT ONLY BECAUSE OF LACK OF TIME IN THE PERIOD SCHEDULED FOR THE LOK SABHA DEBATE. THE TEXT THAT THE MINISTER TOOK INTO THE DEBATE APPARENTLY INCLUDED A SECTION IN WHICH HE SPOKE OF THE NECESSITY OF WORKING OUT NATIONAL INTERSTS

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IN THE CONTEXT OF LARGER WORLD CONCERNS. ONE OF THE EXAMPLES HE HAD INTENDED TO CITE WAS INDIA'S INTEREST IN NUCLEAR ENERGY SELF-SUFFICIENCY TOGETHER WITH ITS RECOGNITION OF THE UNIVERSAL IMPORTANCE OF A WORLD SECURE FROM NUCLEAR THREAT. (THIS IS NOT VAJPAYEE'S PRECISE LANGUAGE. IT IS ONLY MY BEST EFFORT TO REPRODUCE FROM MEMORY AN UNPUBLISHED PORTION OF THE ORIGINAL TEXT AS READ TO ME BY THE FOREIGN SECRETARY.) I SUSPECT THAT THIS PORTION OF THE SPEECH MAY HAVE BEEN INTENDED TO BUILD ACCEPTANCE OF THE GOI'S IMPENDING NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS WITH US.

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